



Quick-Guide #6: Assessing Community Resources for Collaboration

Collaboration can be thought of as a process of leveraging and pooling the resources of diverse individuals and organizations to achieve goals that cannot be achieved alone. Mitigating wildfire risk to communities is one such goal. The need for collaboration is expressed in the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003, which identifies Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs) as a mechanism to enable collaboration among interested and affected parties.

Government entities have a long history of working together on wildfire planning, response, and suppression. However, collaboration between government agencies and communities on wildfire mitigation planning and implementation has been less common. The purpose of this document is to provide conveners of a CWPP process a systematic approach to assess community resources for collaboration and to match assessment information with collaboration opportunities and strategies.

What's going on in this community? Categories of community resources for collaboration and assessment questions:

• Past history and experiences with wildfire – can be a learning opportunity

- √ Has the community experienced a wildfire in the past 5 years?
- √ Is the community located in an area of high fire risk?
- √ What is the level of awareness and knowledge about wildfire risk?

• Community problem-solving efforts focused on natural resources in general – Many communities have existing collaborative efforts or organizations focused on natural resource issues, from improving rangeland and watershed health to managing invasive weed species to forest conservation issues.

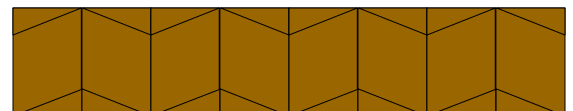
- √ Name of group, council, or organization and contact information
- √ Regular meeting schedule?
- √ Newsletters? Membership list?

• Firewise Community designation – cadre of landowners already aware of wildfire risk and committed to defensible space

- √ Does the community have neighborhoods with FireWise designation?
- √ Have there been defensible space education initiatives in the past 5 years?
- √ Are there local (e.g., county) ordinances requiring firewise construction or defensible space?

• Local institutions focused on wildfire

- √ List existing government institutions and coordination efforts around wildfire response and mitigation. For example, federal and state government offices, rural fire protection districts, volunteer fire departments, county emergency services, citizens' task forces, and intergovernmental wildfire coordinating groups, among others.
 - √ Name of group, fire co-op or emergency response team
 - √ Who are the key contacts?
- (more)



PROCESS

• **Homeowners' Associations** – These and other neighborhood groups are already organized for taking collective actions in neighborhoods.

- √ Names of groups and contact information
- √ Regular meeting schedule?
- √ Newsletters?
- √ Regularly scheduled clean-up or work days?

• **Leaders** – “spark plugs” that can recruit participation and lend legitimacy

- √ Names of leaders and contact information
- √ Interest and availability to engage in CWPP development?
- √ Particular skills that may contribute to the effort, e.g., grant-writing, networking and recruiting, computer, etc.

• **“Sense of place” values** – Most community residents hold deep-seated values for why they live where they do, especially in wildland-urban interface areas. These may include, but are not limited to: family history, land-based livelihood, desire for privacy and to “get away from it all,” a preference for a rural lifestyle, proximity to recreation and wildlife, aesthetics, and affordability compared to urban areas. These can be elicited through questionnaires, focus groups, or simply informal interviews with community leaders and residents.

- √ List of primary social values
- √ Places particularly important to these values
- √ How these values may be affected by wildfire

• **Community profile:** Communities are not homogenous groups of people. Understanding the different segments of a community’s population can identify which groups may be more at risk of wildfire and how to recruit residents to participate in CWPP development.

- √ What is the make-up of the community in terms of age, household income and education levels, family structure, racial and ethnic diversity, population growth, and other socio-economic and demographic information using Census data?
- √ How might this information assist or hinder your planning efforts?
- √ Are there special needs individuals or families who will be especially vulnerable to wildfire?

• **Community infrastructure:** The physical resources of a community are essential to understand, especially to prepare for a wildfire event. The level of response capacity can be an educational tool to instigate residents to participate in CWPP development.

- √ Transportation infrastructure and ease of moving people during an emergency
- √ Water and power supplies
- √ Emergency response capacity
- √ Remoteness and difficulty of access during a wildfire event (more)



PROCESS



• **Government agency personnel living in local community** – These individuals may bring knowledge of ecological conditions, an in-depth understanding of fire behavior and risk, and are connected to community members.

Retired government agency staff are likely to have time and interest to devote to a planning effort.

- √ Names and contact information
- √ Opportunities to recruit community members, e.g., training for ecological monitoring or a “buddy system” to pair an agency person with a community leader to bring to the CWPP process.

• **Education and research institutions** – A local university or college can be a source of scientific, technical, and facilitation resources.

- √ Names of key individuals and contact information
- √ Tribal and woods workers’ organizations can be sources of traditional and local knowledge about natural resources, fire management and use.

What can I do with what I have? Matching available community resources with collaboration opportunities and strategies? A community resource assessment can provide a CWPP organizer with a good idea of where a community is in terms of “readiness” to collaborate on a CWPP. There is a high degree of subjectivity to rating a community’s readiness. For the purposes of planning collaboration opportunities and strategies, we will use a simple rating system of low, medium, and high. These are some ideas for how to proceed:

For a low resource community:

- Bring in an “intermediary” – an individual or organization who can help convene, organize, and facilitate dialogue among residents and agency personnel.
- Start small – focus where there is agreement and shared knowledge.
- Find your strong and trusted leaders – e.g., VFD chief.
- Look to a larger scale/next level for help such as county Fire Safe Council, county emergency planning or planning office.

For a medium resource community:

- Assess what is lacking. If it is trust in natural resource managers – find personnel who have worked well with the community, OR develop a set of ecological principles all can agree on, OR get help in facilitation.

For a high resource community:

- Don’t rest on your laurels – a highly active and knowledgeable community is not immune to conflict. Also, some highly active leaders may be close to burnout and trusted agency personnel could be promoted out of place.

